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Karla Stepat

A LOVESTORY

"Do you like music?" asked the woman sitting next to me at a cocktail party. I had never seen her before. I did not answer immediately and she repeated rather impatiently: "Well, do you like music?"

"Yes, I do, very much so" I said rather puzzled.

"Well then you are definitely the right wife for our friend." I had to smile, she obviously knew more about me than I did about her.

I had been in the United States for eight years, where after my husband's death I came with my son Peter to be close to my aging parents.

"What is all this about?" I was getting curious.

"Friends of ours have a friend who lost his wife 6 months ago. He has no children and is very lonely. We decided to find the right wife for him and I think that's you. You and Joe had to leave Europe because of Hitler and lived many years in Argentina. You must have a lot in common."

"What is this about loving music?" I interjected.

"He loves music, goes to concerts, the Opera, ballets and needs a partner with similar tastes. He is a wonderful, caring and intelligent man and you must meet him."

I really did not want to meet anybody, as over the years I had met several men and was disappointed. They did not seem to understand that they would have to share my affection with my son. I could not deal wit another disappointment.

Our hostess approached and joined us. Trudi immediately told her that I was not enthusiastic about meeting Joe.

"But Karla, of course you should meet him. You can not just work. Peter is already twenty and will get married and you are too young to be left alone. This time you will not be disappointed, Joe is a wonderful man."

"O.K., I'll meet him."

He was supposed to call, but the days passed and he did not.

Then my friend called: "He does not want to go on a blind date, because if you don't like him, you will be obligated to spend the evening with him."

"What a considerate man he is," I thought.

She continued: "He suggests that we all get together at RUMPELMEYER's in Manhattan."

Sounded fine to me. A week later, when I walked into the coffee shop, a gentleman got up to meet me. He was slim, of medium height, had white hair, a kind face and looked rather shy. He escorted me to the table where our mutual friends were sitting. Joe and I were seated at the end of the table. For the next hour we talked and laughed, increasingly enjoying each other's company.

"Joe, we did not say a word to anybody at the table!"

"Don't worry, Karla, they only came so that we could meet."

Aside from music we had so much in common and after 10 days Joe proposed.

"Not so fast" I begged, "give me some time."

"No way, I love you dearly and want to make you happy. My only concern is that I am 14 years older than you."

After six weeks we became engaged and he gave me a beautiful ring. He was old fashioned and wanted people to know that we were getting married.

Six months later we did and I moved into Joe's apartment in Great Neck, Long Island. Joe's accounting office was further out on the island and I would commute to my office in Manhattan. Peter was given the choice to come with me or stay in our Manhattan apartment, sharing it with a friend. He immediately decided to move in with us, as he and Joe adored each other.

Joe and I behaved like two starstruck lovers, went to all the places we liked and enjoyed life together with Peter and our friends. Every Thursday evening I stayed in Manhattan, had dinner with my mother and Joe played cards with his friends.

One Thursday - eight months after we were married - getting off the train in Great Neck, I saw Joe's cousin waiting for me.

"What happened?" I asked anxiously.

"Don't get upset, but Joe had a heart attack and we took him to the hospital. I'll drive you there."

At the hospital Joe could speak to me and the doctor assured us that he would be home soon. But his stay there was extended because of complications. Finally after three weeks I was told that he was well enough to be discharged. That afternoon, when I got to the hospital, a nurse called me over before I could reach Joe' room and sat me down. A doctor then told me that Joe had died 15 minutes earlier. An autopsy showed that his aorta broke and he never knew what

happened to him. His roommate told me that Joe was so happy to be going home and to be together again with me all the time.

The dream lasted 8 months and 3 weeks, the pain will last forever.

Karla Stept